



INTER OFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: Sabrina B. Landreth
City Administrator

FROM: Jamie Turbak
Director of Library Services

SUBJECT: Master Fee Schedule
FY 2019-20 Library Narrative

DATE: February 9, 2019

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Oakland Public Library seeks approval to change the Master Fee Schedule for Fiscal Year 2019-2020. Minor edits and obsolete charges are noted in the attached spreadsheet under "Justification for Fee Change" to explain typos or updates to library services that have negligible fiscal impact.

The significant request is to eliminate an institutional barrier to library use, namely overdue fines for library materials that are returned past the due date.

Nationwide, libraries are recognizing that overdue fines create unnecessary and inequitable barriers to resources and many have gone "fine-free". Currently, Oakland Public Library does not charge overdue fines for youth, but fiscal penalties remain for adults. Our library overdue fines disproportionately impact communities of color, which in Oakland are the most likely to be living below the federal poverty level, to be homeless, and to lack high speed internet access, according to the 2018 Oakland Equity Indicators Report.

BACKGROUND

The City Council has oversight over library fines through the Master Fee Schedule. Overdue fines appear on a patron's account after an item has been returned past the due date. When fines and/or fees reach a cumulative total of \$50, a library patron is not allowed to borrow materials until the amount is paid to less than \$50.

In March, 2017, with City Council approval, the Library eliminated overdue fines for youth patrons with the following impacts:

- Number of Juvenile and Teen library cardholders increased by 10,141, or 17%
- Circulation of Juvenile and Teen materials increased by 98,627 items, or 12%
- No impact to the rate of unreturned items

The library now seeks to extend the elimination of overdue fines to adults.

ANALYSIS AND POLICY ALTERNATIVES

The proposed ordinance to modify Oakland Public Library fines will promote equity and reduce a barrier that disproportionately harms communities of color and households with incomes below the median.

Overdue fines negatively affect patrons who can least afford the fine and are not an effective incentive to returning library materials. For those who can afford the fines, paying a small late fee is no problem, so the fines are not a strong incentive. On the other hand, for those with limited financial means, they commonly stop using the Library rather than pay what they can't afford.

Users are billed a replacement fee for items not returned 30 days past the due date. The fee is excused when the item is returned. This is the most effective way to ensure residents responsibly return library materials.

It is abundantly clear that overdue fines disproportionately impact communities of color. The library analyzed impacts using the zip code framework in the Oakland Equity Indicators report, comparing zip codes in which more than 60% of the population is non-White and zip codes in which more than 60% of the population is White (based on American Community Survey 5-year estimates, 2012-2016).

In this analysis, an adult in a predominantly non-White zip code in Oakland, compared to an adult in a predominantly White zip code in Oakland, is:

- 5% more likely to have fines exceeding \$50 dollars, resulting in a blocked record
- 26% more likely to owe library fines
- 24% more likely to have a library card
- 45% less likely to use their card (based on average total checkout)

According to the Oakland Equity Indicators report, these adults are also the most likely to be living below the federal poverty level, to be homeless, and to lack high speed internet access (which the library can provide through a library card).

Removing overdue fines for adults in Oakland will reduce economic barriers to the free public library resources for our neediest communities. Removing overdue fines for all ages have proven in other library systems to result in:

- Increase in overall use of library materials
- No increase in unreturned materials
- Neutral fiscal impact

In addition, eliminating overdue fines increases staff capacity to directly serve the needs of the public, as it frees staff from monetary transactions. The Library estimates that an average of \$200,000 in staff time is spent annually in fine negotiations, collections and deposits.

Nationwide, libraries are removing overdue fines. In the Bay Area alone, Berkeley Public Library went fine free in July 2018, Contra Costa County Libraries and San Mateo Public Libraries in January 2019, and others are expected to follow suit in 2019. When St. Paul, Minnesota libraries went fine free in January 2019, their mayor Melvin Carter noted in an interview with KARE Channel 11 that overdue fines “don’t make people bring books back, they make people stay away from the library.” Oakland Public Library staff affirm this, noting that even the potential of a fine is a deterrent to some parents signing up for a library card for their children or themselves.

To achieve these positive impacts for Oakland residents, the attached proposed adjustments to the master fee schedule eliminate overdue fines for most materials, and significantly reduce fines

for tools. We have proposed compacting categories of tools subject to fines, and reducing fines for high-value tools from 50%-75%.

FISCAL IMPACT

In FY 2017-18 the library collected \$77,600 in overdue fines which are deposited to the General Purpose Fund (Fund 1010). However, as noted above, it costs the City more than twice that amount in staff time to collect that income.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Jamie Turbak", written over a horizontal line.

JAMIE TURBAK
Director of Library Services
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